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Go....Teach all Nations....Matt. xxviii. 19.

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SERMON LXXIII.

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THE WISDOM AND BEAUTY OF YOUTHFUL FIFTY.

Prov. viii. 16, 17.—*I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me. Riches and honor are with me, yea, durable riches and righteousness.*

THE old remark has much force, "If religion be *any thing*, it is *every thing*,—if it be *at all* important, it is *all-important*." If the truth of the religion of the Gospel be admitted, and its claims be acknowledged, that truth is confessedly invaluable, and these claims are supremely imperative. To delay at any time, and under any circumstances, in making a decided and unreserved surrender to these claims, must ever be an act of folly and madness. Yet there is nothing more common than procrastination in this matter; nothing more common than to silence the testimony of conscience, and still the urgent emotions of the heart, by the presumptuous expectation of future time and opportunity to discharge a work, acknowledged as a present duty. Delay is truly "the thief of time," and the murderer of the soul. The sinner delays, and while he delays, temptation is yielded to, corruption indulged, evil habits strengthened, sinful associations multiplied, the conscience stifled, the heart hardened, the Holy Spirit grieved, and divine wrath provoked. Surely "it is madness to defer." The season of youth is of incalculable importance. It is the morning which enables us to augur the character and condition of more advanced life, and of that eternity which follows. It is the seed-time which leads us to anticipate the harvest. The anxious regards of the wise are ever extended to the young, in reference to the welfare and prospects of the church and of society. The chapter from which the text is taken, commends the excellence and value of *wisdom*, or true religion, and presses its claims upon the children of men. The text declares the complacency which God reposes in true piety, the encouragement given to the young for seeking and cultivating it, and the inestimable blessings which it conveys to its possessors. It is designed to *urge upon the young the pre-eminent importance of piety*, by several considerations:—

I. RELIGION ALONE IS FITTED TO FORM AND PRESERVE PURITY OF CHARACTER AND CONDUCT, AND TO FURNISH SOURCES OF TRUE HAPPINESS.

The decision must be made between the religion of the Bible and no religion. It cannot now be a matter of inquiry, whether the claims and evidences of the Christian religion may be compared with the claims and evidences of any other system of religion. Christianity in this age, shines forth in the fulness and clear-

ness of its evidences, and opposition to it will ever be found connected with, and resulting from, a disaffection to that relation and accountableness which we sustain under the government of a holy and just God, and which lies at the very foundation of religion. The weapons which infidelity employs, most commonly and artfully, are ridicule and misrepresentation. While it sports with what is sacred, awful, and lovely, it makes its appeal to the base and selfish passions of our nature. This, adapted to the dispositions and circumstances of its intended victims, may be so varied and concealed as to require watchfulness and discrimination, in order to discover and resist it. The humility, candor, seriousness, docility, and prayer, which are so requisite in the investigation of truth, have manifestly always been wanting in infidels. Pride and passion have controlled reason, and the grand exceptions secretly taken to Christianity, have ever been the humility it requires, and the holiness it enjoins. Who could now advert to any system of theology, or any code of morals existing in pagan nations, past or present, where the light of Christianity has not shined, and not confess the proofs they exhibit of the imbecility of the human intellect, and the depravity of our fallen nature. It was in the Augustan age of Rome, when the orb of science was most dazzling, that idolatry, in its varied forms of the grossest and most revolting absurdity, was the religion of the state and the people; and that the melancholy picture of public and private morals was drawn by Paul, in the 1st chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. Infidelity, though ever inconsistent with itself, will at times admit and vindicate some of the elementary principles of religion, and will beautifully descant upon the duties of an exalted and refined morality. For this, however, it is indebted to revelation. Having thus lighted its taper, it would vainly and ungratefully attempt to blot out the great Sun of Righteousness, which "brings life and immortality to light."

The religion of the Gospel unfolds to the sinner his own character and that of God, applies the divine law in its spirituality and strictness, leads to repentance, exhibits the glorious scheme of redemption, inspires faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, renovates the heart, directs and supports in the way of holiness and beneficence, supplies consolations suited to all the exigencies of outward and inward tribulation, ministers that "peace which the world giveth not," and which "passeth understanding," animates with the hope of glory, and conducts to the "inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

Can any substitute be found for such religion? It has been said, conscience will avail to preserve men from vice, and lead them to virtue. But what is conscience? It is that principle which approves when we do right, and condemns when we do wrong. It consequently refers to a standard of right and wrong, applies this standard, and gives its verdict. If the standard be false or partial, the decisions of conscience will of course be erroneous. An unenlightened and defiled conscience may approve the darkest and foulest deeds. Truth must enlighten, and the power of truth must purify and pacify the conscience of men. This is the province of religion. "Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth."

It is also said, the principle of honor will avail to preserve men in respectability and usefulness. But what is this principle of honor? It is a reigning regard to those maxims which regulate men especially in the more elevated ranks of life, in their relations and intercourse with each other. It adapts itself to all the changes of maxims and habits which occur in fashionable life. Nothing more clearly manifests the opposition of the spirit of the world to the spirit of truth and holiness, than the operation of this principle of honor. Says Dr. Paley, "The law of honor only prescribes and regulates the duties between equals, omitting such as relate to the Supreme Being, as well as those which we owe to our inferiors,—for which reason profaneness,

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neglect of public worship, or private devotion, cruelty to servants, rigorous treatment of tenants or other dependants, want of charity to the poor, injuries done to tradesmen by insolvency or delay of payment, with numberless examples of the same kind, are accounted no breaches of honor; because a man is not less an agreeable companion for these vices, nor the worse to deal with in those concerns which are usually transacted between one gentleman and another. Again, the law of honor being constituted by men occupied in the pursuit of pleasure, and for the mutual convenience of such men, will be found, as might be expected from the character and design of the law-makers, to be in most instances favorable to the licentious indulgence of natural passions. Thus it allows of fornication, adultery, drunkenness, prodigality, duelling, and of revenge in the extreme, and lays no stress on the opposite virtues." Contrast with this the pure morality of Scripture. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."

Is it said, that a refined education will discipline the mind and manners, and give consistency and respectability to character? It is admitted, that education is of high importance, and exerts a mighty influence on character. But that influence will correspond to the instruction and discipline employed. The harvest will exhibit a product of a nature like the seed that was sown. An education not conducted upon religious principles, nor exerting a religious influence, may indeed restrain and polish, may promote the courtesies and refinements of life, may produce benefits of a certain kind, and to a certain extent, but it cannot reach and control the inner man, and form it to virtue and happiness. It can never be said of any human system of instruction, as of sacred truth, in the eloquent language of the Psalmist—"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever; the judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether; more to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is thy servant warned, and in keeping of them there is great reward. Who can understand his errors.—Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins."—"True religion can make the soul happy in the absence of a thousand supposed requisites to felicity. In poverty, there is no want which it cannot alleviate; in sickness, no pang which it cannot relieve; in reproach, no stain which it cannot wipe away; in bondage, no chain which it cannot lighten; and in death, no sting which it cannot take away. It brings a contentment which blesses poverty,—a patience which alleviates sickness,—a brightness which pours confusion on slander; a freedom from the bondage of corruption, which makes the rod of oppression light; a faith by which death is vanquished; and, in the latter end, it has "fulness of joy, in God's presence, and at his right hand pleasures for evermore." With what eagerness, then, should the young seize this "pearl of great price," this "one thing needful," this "good part which shall never be taken away?"

II. RELIGION ALONE CAN GUIDE, AND SECURE, AMID THE DANGERS WHICH ARE INCIDENT AND PECULIAR TO YOUTH.

Youth is full of ardor of feeling, and brightness of expectation; while destitute of that knowledge, experience, and discipline, which are necessary to instruct and fortify amid the perils by the way. A young man thus entering into life without the support and guidance of religion, is like a vessel with its sails spread open to every breeze, committing itself to the ocean without chart, rudder, or pilot, tossed to and fro in the darkness of midnight, conflicting with violent storms, and ready every moment to be dashed on the rocks, or

swallowed up in the abyss. The young enter the world with their imaginations lively and excursive, their desires strong and often impetuous, and their expectations eager and lofty. Their reason is without the aid of experience; their judgment is undisciplined; the world, whose treachery and falsehood are yet unknown, presents scenes to draw them from virtue and from peace. In such a state, what can avail to protect, save, and bless, but religion, extending its influence to the understanding, the affections, and the life? "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word. Thy word is a light to my feet, and a lamp to my path."

Ardor of feeling, and want of experience, combined, give rise to rashness and presumption, instead of that humility and caution which are so greatly necessary. Evil companions around ply many temptations, and lay many snares. These are the greatest dangers incident to youth. Attached to company, in the warmth of their feelings, and in the spring-tide of life, the young are not aware of their peril, until they fall victims. Many a promising youth, who seemed at one time setting out in the ways of piety, has been arrested in his course, by some evil associate, and ruined for ever. How different the result when a young man is brought under a sacred influence, which enables him to break from irreligious companions, and walk only with the wise? Wherefore, "take fast hold of instruction; let her not go; keep her, for she is thy life—enter not into the path of the wicked,—avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away. The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding."

III. YOUTH IS THE MOST FAVORABLE SEASON FOR ATTAINING AND CULTIVATING PIETY.

We have noticed the dangers arising from the buoyancy and ardor of youth, their want of experience, and the temptations by which they are continually solicited. But in this period, there are advantages which should be carefully regarded, and faithfully improved. Now the affections are more warm and tender, the conscience is more readily impressed, the mind is less filled with prejudice, and less swayed by the pride of opinion, than at any subsequent period. The heart is now unchilled by the commerce of the world, free from the callousness of age, and hence is more easily moved by the love of God, by the mercy of the Redeemer, by all those tender incitements to duty which the Gospel presents. The passions though more ardent, are nevertheless more manageable, more easily turned from improper objects, than when long indulged, and when habits shall have been confirmed. Hence the principles of piety commonly find, in the youthful mind, a soil most favorable to their implantation, growth, and fruitfulness. True, the human heart, like the natural soil, produces spontaneously only thorns and briers, and requires careful and diligent culture to prepare it for the good seed; and, at whatever period the good seed may be sown, it will not spring up, unless it be watered, and quickened by heavenly influence. But God operates in the work of grace, as well as in nature, according to an order established by himself. Thus youth is fitted and intended for improvement of every kind, for improvement in morals and piety, as well as in understanding and knowledge. And accordingly, in youth the living power of his grace is most frequently experienced. The cares of business, also, which occupy so much of the time and thoughts of men in subsequent life, do not entangle and occupy the young. The world cannot oppose them in such variety of ways, and to such perilous extent as it will do afterward.

IV. BY DELAY, THE DIFFICULTIES AND OBSTACLES, WHICH OPPOSE THE ATTAINMENT OF PIETY, ARE CONTINUALLY INCREASED.

As corruption is cherished, it gains strength: as habits are exercised

they acquire an iron force, and hold us in thorough bondage.—We resist the convictions of conscience, and the force of truth. The gratifications by which we have been tempted to evil, become more and more attractive and resistless. We are led at first to palliate what we cannot justify, and then we justify what before we condemned. Conscience is at first tender and readily quickened; it raises its warning voice, until, repeatedly opposed, it becomes silent: it awakens contrition and sorrow, until continually resisted, in the loss of every generous emotion, it becomes hard and callous. New and tender attachments to the world and sin are created, and old ones strengthened, so that links are daily added to the chain of our captivity; and we are more and more incapacitated to break the bonds thus increased and riveted.

God, who is rich in mercy, still adapts its dispensations to the constitution of our nature, and the discipline of truth, and love, under which he has placed us. He will honor his own institutions, and mark their abuse. But his grieved Spirit will not always strive with man. Hence the well-known fact, that a vast majority of those who have become pious, became so at an early period of life.—While the piety of the comparatively few who turn to God at a more advanced period generally assumes a far more doubtful character.

V. EARLY PIETY IS PECULIARLY ACCEPTABLE TO GOD.

"I love them that love me, and they that seek me *early* shall find me." This special promise furnishes peculiar encouragement to the young. Religion in the soul is the fruit of grace, the operation of the Spirit. All hope in relation to it should be connected with the promise God has given. That promise stipulates, "they that seek me *early* shall find me." Early piety is peculiarly *decided, cheerful, active, useful* piety. Such is the piety God approves, and delights in. Under the legal dispensation, God required the first fruits to be devoted to him. This typical service is realized under the Gospel dispensation, by devoting the first fruits of our reason and affections, of our days, and our services, unto God our Redeemer. Our blessed Redeemer himself was in all things a perfect model of early piety, in all its beauty and richness, in all its vigor and fruitfulness. He who on one occasion so kindly and tenderly said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven," on another occasion observed with delightful interest the children in the temple singing hosanna to the Son of David, and said, "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast ordained praise." No character is so much commended to the best feelings of our nature as youthful piety, in the conviction that it is the character which God peculiarly delights in. How lovely is young Samuel, the child of prayer, early responding to the divine voice, "Here am I," and ministering unto the Lord. How interesting is young Timothy, in whom was "the unfeigned faith, which first dwelt in his grandmother Lois, and in his mother Eunice;" who, from his childhood, "knew the Scriptures which were able to make him wise unto salvation, and to furnish him for every good work." How distinguished is Abijah in the morning of life, the solitary one in the degenerate family of his father Jeroboam, in whom "some good thing was found towards the Lord God of Israel."

VI. EARLY PIETY FURNISHES THE MOST DECIDED AND SATISFYING EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER.

The dedication to the service of the Redeemer, which the young disciple makes in all the vividness of his feelings, with all the bright prospects of this life unfolding to him, and in the enjoyment of health and prosperity, carries with it the testimony of sincerity, cordiality, and entire devotedness. It is a homage not forced, but freely given. He does not leave the world by constraint, as it forsakes him, while he would gladly retain it—but from deliberate conviction, he retires from it, or rather rises above it, when it presents its

inviting allurements, and unfolds the multitude and richness of its resources. In the full blaze of the world's light, he asks, "Lift thou upon me *the light of thy countenance*." Amid the plenitude of the world's dainties, he prays, "Ever more give me the bread of heaven." Amid all the relations of life, he says, "In the saints and excellent of the earth, is all my delight." The piety which appears to commence in affliction is always dubious. The tears, and confessions, and supplications, and vows need to be tested by mingling in the converse and business of the world, in health and prosperity. Ah! most commonly that seeming goodness proves "like the morning cloud and the early dew." Sometimes, indeed, we are led to say, blessed was that affliction which opened the heart to God; as returning days of prosperity and continuance of life have testified. But how great an advantage is possessed by the youthful pilgrim, who commences his journey in the morning of his day, and continually presses onward; while he who, at a more advanced period, is, through rich mercy, brought to enter the course, remains far behind, struggling with difficulties and obstacles which have accumulated by his long delay, and were unknown to the former. The profession of religion in declining years, "when the evil days come, and the years draw nigh in which they say, we have no pleasure in them," too often resembles the case of Joab, fleeing to the horns of the Altar, when the peril of death pressed upon him; not for devotion, but in the vain hope of immunity from the judgment pronounced. How unlike the youthful worshipper, who exclaims, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord, all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple." When the rare instance occurs of hopeful piety commencing late in life, it resembles the "short-lived gleam, which, after a day of clouds and of storms, bursts forth in the evening, but calls forth few sounds of joy in nature around, and yields little advantage to the labors of man." The youthful convert is like the morning light, "which shineth more and more unto the perfect day," and in which all nature rejoices, and "man goeth forth to his work." "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear." If, while there are "fears without and fightings within," we are continually called to examine ourselves; if, while "laying aside every weight, and the sin that doth most easily beset us, we are to look to Jesus as the Author and finisher of our faith," then truly early piety has a decided superiority as to the evidence of its genuine character.

VII. EARLY PIETY ALONE SECURES THAT FULL ENJOYMENT WHICH RELIGION IS DESIGNED TO IMPART.

"O satisfy us early with thy mercy, that we may rejoice all our day." "Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace." The direct influence of religion is to subdue evil passions, and to save from those vices which pollute and destroy. Man carries in his own bosom the elements of happiness or misery. "The good man is satisfied from himself." While on the other hand, "there is no peace to the wicked—they are like the troubled sea which casteth up mire and dirt." It is the office of religion to subdue and eradicate the elements of misery—and to implant and nourish the elements of happiness. It fixes just and firm principles in the mind, and diffuses kind, pure, and generous emotions through the heart. It exerts an influence on body and soul, producing soundness and health. It secures from those dangers which surround our path. It wisely directs our plans for life, and blesses us in our secular enterprises: it hallows and endears the connections of life, in the bonds of the Spirit. It does not prevent affliction—but it converts it into a blessing—ministers consolation to the wounded spirit—imparts joy in tribulation, and produces in the issue righteousness and peace.

Early piety secures the blessings of religion through the course of life, and secures them in the largest measure. If the choice of religion is sincerely and decidedly made in advanced life, still the habits which have been long indulged, insensibly and strongly draw the heart away from what is pure and spiritual. The pursuit of spiritual objects, which in earlier days would have been comparatively easy, is now tried amid continued agitation and conflict. The worldly habits of the young have not yet acquired such strength as to present any formidable opposition, while with unclouded minds and affectionate choice, they devote themselves to the Redeemer: waiting on him, they renew their strength, "they mount up with wings like eagles, they run and are not weary, they walk and faint not." Those who early become pious experience a purer and larger joy, from the fact, that they are saved from those corrupt associations of thought, which so much distract the exercises of later converts.

Youth has been termed the season of hope, manhood of active exertion, and old age of retrospection. The earlier scenes of life are sketched most vividly in our memory, and the early instructions we received remain indelible. When decrepitude of mind and body advances, recent events leave no impression, and the aged man continues to ponder on the scenes of youth long since gone by. As the book of his life opens before his memory, there is continually presented to view the page of youth, inscribed in bright and legible characters. Need we wonder, then, at the emphasis with which Scripture adverts to the "sins of our youth." Says Job, "Thou writest bitter things against me, thou causest me to possess the sins of my youth." Says David, "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions." In Jeremiah, penitent Ephraim is represented as saying, "I was ashamed, yea, I was confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth." Dark and cheerless is the evening of that life which has been spent in devotion to the world, and in neglect of eternal things; but calm and serene is the evening of the Christian—when his sun which rose fair and clear in the morning of life, goes down in full-orbed brightness, only to rise again in purer heavens, and in cloudless and everlasting splendor.

VIII. EARLY PIETY IS THE BEST PREPARATION FOR GREAT AND EXTENDED USEFULNESS IN THE SERVICE OF CHRIST.

Life is at best but short, and ever uncertain. If even prolonged to the ordinary measure of human life, the period would still be short for the great work of making our calling and election sure, and glorifying God on earth. The days and years devoted to the world are not only lost as to the true and proper use of life, but they leave an influence behind them, which, if religion subsequently assume its sway, will minister such embarrassments, difficulties, and sorrows as will weaken its power, limit its benefits, and mar its comforts. Bitter must be that penitential regret which fills the mind of the late convert, when he reviews the past, as he purposes to begin a new life. The best of his days are irrevocably gone—the choicest period of his life has been spent in sin and folly. The peculiar advantages enjoyed by youth for attaining the knowledge, enjoying the comforts, and discharging the services of religion are passed away. He finds it exceedingly difficult to withstand the force of habit and associations—he finds every effort needed to carry on the conflict with himself and the world in a defensive attitude, while the early convert, having passed on his course consistently, constantly carries the attack into the very heart of the enemy's camp with success, and actively pursues the work of well-doing. Early piety furnishes seasonable and appropriate training for the Savior's service. In the parable of the talents, the faithful are represented as "trading" with their talents, and receiving gain—Use facilitates and directs the proper employment of our means and opportunities of doing good.

We gain increasing acquaintance with our own hearts, with human nature, with the temptations which attend us, and the difficulties and obstacles which must be encountered in the way of holiness and beneficence. The character of undeviating integrity, and of active, unwearied beneficence, more and more commends itself to the conscience and affections, and continually opens freer, and wider, and more numerous avenues to usefulness. A life from early youth exhibiting fair consistency, in one unblemished course of uprightness, purity, kindness, and beneficence, will furnish the clearest and most convincing testimony to the character and claims of the religion we profess; a testimony not readily misunderstood, nor resisted. "Who will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good." In later conversion, whatever evident change may appear, it will be difficult to inspire confidence. The effort to counteract the influence of past life will be exceedingly difficult, and in very many cases unavailing. Facility in the use and means possessed, and fertility in the invention of new methods to resist evil and do good, are wanting and are found unattainable. The pious youth enters the field in the morning, and, bearing the heat and burden of the day, with increasing skill and vigor accomplishes his work, and at evening finds a full harvest gathered. The later convert enters, perhaps near the evening, and having spent his time and strength in the service of sin, the world, and Satan, and gathered a harvest of vanity, he now proceeds with faltering steps, and feeble efforts to glean a few solitary light sheaves. It is difficult to calculate the amount of influence which may be exerted by a life early directed by piety, and extended to old age; difficult to say how many talents may be gained, by continued, careful, and skilful "trading;" difficult to estimate how much the Master may be glorified, and men blessed by the multiplied, varied, and ripe fruits of holy living, and beneficent exertions. "The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age—they shall be fat and flourishing."

IX. TO YOUTH, AS WELL AS TO OTHERS, THE PRESENT IS THE ONLY MOMENT SECURED OR PROMISED.

"What is your life? it is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away; for that ye ought to say, if the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that." The folly of presuming upon the future, with the hope of rightfully improving it, has been shown. Every day spent in neglect of the "one thing needful," increases the indisposition to spiritual things, strengthens the power of corruption and selfishness, and increases the force of habit. The path in which sinners travel, is one which leads directly from God,—every step leads to a greater distance from him.—The way is downward and slippery—the force of motion is continually increased, the rapidity of descent is constantly accelerated. Who knows when the verge of the precipice will be reached, and the final leap shall be taken? Who in this course to hell dare presume on the future for an interposing power to arrest his accelerated descent, and deliver from the wrath to come? Who knows what a day may bring forth? Ah, sinner, before the light of this day passes away, thy lifeless body may wait the opened grave, and thy soul be in hell. "What thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." How often do we find death arresting youth, sportive and gay, in the bloom of beauty, the vigor of health, the brightness of worldly prospects, and the endearments of earthly relations! On that sick bed, reflection on the past and apprehension of the future, seize on the spirit, notwithstanding the efforts of mistaken friends to prevent it. At last the certainty of approaching death appears in full view.—Oh, what alarm then seizes the conscience,—what pangs rend the heart! "In that very day his thoughts perish!" The world, as to all it gave, and promised, lost,—the

means of grace lost—heaven lost ! He expires.—In that chamber of mourning and wo, where the world's light is closed in utter darkness, not one ray of heaven's light penetrates the gloom. Follow the body to the narrow house, and trace the spirit to its eternal abode, and learn the emphasis of the question, "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Early piety often meets with an early death. In such case we mourn, but not as those without hope. Having witnessed the promising blossoms, and enjoyed the earlier fruit, we are disappointed, and feel our loss in not being permitted to reap the riper and more abundant fruits. But the chamber where the pious youth dies is hallowed. There he who cordially relinquished the world for the pursuit of heaven, now finds himself at the threshold of the desired mansion. He ministers the lessons of affection and truth,—he calmly bids farewell to time and earth,—he testifies his firm and lively hope of heavenly glory,—faith triumphs, as in whispering accents, with beaming eye and placid countenance, he exclaims, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" Thanks "be unto God, who giveth the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ!" He falls asleep in Jesus. What fellow-youth standing by, would not say, "Let me die his death, let my last end be like his."

A venerable mother in Israel was standing by the deathbed of an amiable and pious daughter, over whose sickness she had long and affectionately watched: That daughter expired strong in the faith of Jesus, and exulting in hope. With placid countenance, and uplifted eye, in the fulness of her heart, that mother said, "I wish you joy, my dear;" and calmly retired, to seek that repose which wearied nature required. Here was an exquisite combination of the tenderest parental feeling, mingled with the loftiest triumphs of faith and hope.

Beloved youth, "Choose ye this day." Life and death are before you. To-day the Almighty says to each of you, "Thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help." "Incline thine ear, and hearken unto me; and I will be a Father to you." But to-morrow his grieved, insulted Spirit may say, "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone." O, then there would be "weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth for ever." "To-day, then, if ye will hear his voice, *harden not your heart.*"—AMEN.

SERMON LXXIV.

BY AUSTIN DICKINSON, A.M.

APPEAL TO AMERICAN YOUTH ON TEMPERANCE.

1 JOHN, II. 14.—*I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong.*

1 COR. IX. 25.—*Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things.*

To remove a great national evil, the influence of the young is all-important. And the fact, that Intemperance is here sacrificing its thirty thousand victims annually, surely demands their special attention. *They* can, if they please, put an end to this desolating scourge; and that without any sacrifice. Ponder then, beloved youth, the following reasons for abstaining entirely from ardent spirit.

1. *The use of it will do you no good.*—It will not increase your property : no merchant would deem a relish for it essential to a good clerk, or partner in business. It will not invigorate your body, or your mind ; for physicians tell us, it contains no more nourishment, than fire or lightning. It will not increase the number of your respectable friends : no one, in his right mind, would esteem a brother or neighbor the more, or think his prospects the better, on account of his occasional use of intoxicating liquor. Nor will it in the least purify or elevate your affections ; or fit you for the endearments of domestic life : no parent, should you seek alliance with his family, would require you first to become a lover of ardent spirit ; for, saith the prophet, wine and its kindred indulgences “*take away the heart.*” Why, then, should a rational being, capable of the purest enjoyment, yield to a custom, in no respect useful ; but rather the occasion of countless miseries ?

2. Drinking ardent spirit, if it do no good, *is a great and wicked waste.* The use of only a single glass daily, by the ten millions of freemen in the United States, would, in fifty years, at one cent a glass, amount to *eighteen hundred millions of dollars* ; a sum abundantly sufficient to supply with colleges, academies, and schools, every city and district of our country. And yet, according to official returns to government, the amount of ardent spirit annually imported and manufactured in the United States, would far more than furnish a glass daily to each of ten millions ; and every body knows, that the average cost to consumers must be more than one cent a glass.

And let it be admitted, that all the time now employed in importing, manufacturing, distributing, and drinking this liquor, might be devoted to other business at least equally productive ; and here you have another item of *eighteen hundred millions of dollars wasted* : the simple *interest* of which, (exceeding one hundred millions per annum,) would be sufficient to support the Christian ministry throughout the nation, to pay all our public taxes, and to carry on great national improvements.

Add to these the enormous expenses of sickness, pauperism, crime, and premature death, occasioned in the same period by ardent spirit, and you have a *third* item of at least *eighteen hundred millions of dollars wasted* :—which would purchase a Bible for every inhabitant of the globe. Any one who has patience to calculate a little, will see that these estimates are far within bounds. And will our sober and intelligent youth, when they know these facts, be instrumental in occasioning such waste ?

3. Indulgence in ardent spirit *is offensive to the Giver of all mercies.* It is not a “creature of God”—any more than cards, or murderous weapons—but of man’s invention ; and of comparatively recent invention ; originating, like the Mahomedan imposture, in “the land of robbers.” Had the all-wise Creator deemed it absolutely *necessary* for man, can it be supposed that he would have suffered thousands of years to pass, ere the method of making it was known ? Or had He deemed the habitual use of it *good* for man, would He have created him with a disgust for it, which requires the insidious practice of sweetening and diluting to overcome ?

The spirit of the Bible, as well as uncorrupted taste, is in direct hostility to this intoxicating poison. Its uniform language in regard to all such impurities is, *Touch not, taste not, handle not.* He, who hath solemnly said, *Drunkards shall not inherit the kingdom of God,* cannot, surely, look with complacency, even on those who *sip* the polluting cup ; and who, by their *example*, encourage others to drink still deeper in the pollution. Common sense, as well as piety, revolts at the thought.

On the other hand, strict temperance is pleasing to the Most High. Thus it was said of him, who was honored to announce the Savior’s advent ; “He shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong

drink." In the view of Omniscience, then, true greatness is associated with entire abstinence from this artificial stimulus.

4. The use of spiritous liquor, *has a perverting and debasing influence; and leads to other sensual indulgences; as well as to foul speeches and foolish contracts.* Men excited by this poison, will say things and do things, which in other circumstances they would abhor. They will slander, and reveal secrets, and throw away property, and offend modesty, and profane sacred things, and indulge the vilest passions, and abuse the nearest relatives, and cover themselves and families with infamy. Hence the strict and solemn caution of the Holy Book; "Look not thou on the wine when it is red, when it giveth its colour in the cup: at the last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder: thine eyes shall behold strange women; and thine heart shall utter perverse things." Those who by gaming or intrigue rob others of their property, and those who allure the "simple" and unsuspecting to the chamber of death and hell, understand this deceitful tendency of ardent spirit. Hence the exhilarating glass is presented as their first enticement. "*Is it not a little one?*" say they, with insidious smile; and so the unwary are "*caused to fall by little and little.*"

"She urged him still to fill another cup;
..... and in the dark still night,
When God's unsleeping eye alone can see,
He went to her adulterous bed. At morn
I looked, and saw him not among the youths:
I heard his father mourn, his mother weep;
For none returned that went with her. The dead
Were in her house; her guests in depths of hell;
She wove the winding sheet of souls, and laid
Them in the urn of everlasting death."

Such is ever the certain tendency, if not always the fatal end of the insidious cup. For, says Solomon, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and whosoever is deceived thereby, is not wise." The sentiment is reiterated by Isaiah; "They are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision; they stumble in judgment." And One infinitely greater than Solomon or Isaiah, hath said, that *drunkards* and *adulterers* shall go to the *same place of torment.*

5. *The habit of drinking once established, it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to break off in more advanced life.* Thus, in this day of reformation, and in places where the reformation is very general, there are individuals, even members of churches, so accustomed to drink and to traffic in the poison, that all the remonstrances of conscience, the wailings of the ruined, the authority of God, and the odium of public sentiment combined, cannot now restrain them. In despite of all, they still drink on, and, in some instances, even those sustaining important offices in the church, blush not, in this day of light, to deal out for paltry gain this article of death and perdition! O, could an angel speak to such men, he would thunder with Paul, "*Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils.*" But our business and hope are with the young: Let the youth, then, who now turn with shame from such examples of inconsistency and guilt, beware of contracting a habit so *hardening* to the conscience, so *deadening* to the soul.

6. It is a solemn consideration, which must have great weight with such as reverence the Bible, that even *moderate drinking may for ever exclude the saving influences of the Holy Spirit.* Says one, distinguished by his writings and his extensive usefulness as a preacher; "If, while under conviction, a person allows himself to *sip* a little—he is *sure* to *grieve away the Spirit of God.*" And this testimony, the result of long observation, is in perfect

accordance with reason and Scripture. For, (to say nothing of the deadening influence of ardent spirit on the conscience,) unless heaven and hell can work together, God *cannot*, consistently, send *his* Spirit to co-operate with that *spirit*, which Satan employs, more than any other agent, in fitting men for his service and kingdom : for, "what communion hath light with darkness ? and what concord hath Christ with Belial ?" and how "can two walk together except they be agreed ?" If, then, "ye know these things," and desire salvation, O, beware of "sinning against the Holy Ghost !"

7. To increase your disgust for ardent spirit, *think how the use of it prevails among the most despised and degraded portions of the community.* Inquire through the city or the village, for those who are so polluted by vice as to be shut out from all decent society, so changed to the image of the beast, that they cannot be looked upon but with abhorrence ; learn their history, and you invariably find, that the bottle has been their familiar companion. Enter their retreats of midnight revelry, and you still find that rum is the all-inspiring divinity among them—that this spirit from beneath seems needful to fit them for the work of their master. And should not the most decided reprobation be stamped upon that, which is always found associated with the lowest state of debasement and crime ?

8. Be persuaded to strict temperance by the reflection, *that in the purest state of morals, and in the most intelligent and refined circles, ardent spirit is not tolerated.* Who would not be shocked at the supposition, that this liquor was carried about by the twelve apostles and their Lord ! or that it was offered to them at such houses as they found "worthy ?" What assembly of divines, feeling the sacredness of their office, would now be found "mingling strong drink ?" What select band of students, hoping soon to officiate at the altar of God, before the bench of justice, or in the chamber of affliction, would now call for brandy ? What circle of refined females would not feel themselves about as much degraded by indulging in rum, as by smoking or swearing ? What Christian church would not be shocked at a proposal for stimulating their social meetings with this noxious spirit ? Or what parent, inquiring for an eligible boarding-school, would think of asking, whether his child might there be sure to have the aid of this stimulus ? If then ardent spirit cannot be tolerated in the most moral, intelligent, and refined *associations*, why should it not in like manner be wholly discarded by *individuals* ? Why should not the young, especially, of both sexes, keep themselves unspotted, and worthy of a place in the most pure and refined society !

9. Be persuaded to strict temperance, *by a consideration of its happy influence on the health and vigor of both mind and body.* The most eminent physicians bear uniform testimony to this propitious effect of entire abstinence. And the Spirit of inspiration has recorded, *He that striveth for the mastery, is temperate in all things.* Many striking examples might be adduced. The mother of Samson, that prodigy of human strength, was instructed by an angel of God to preserve him from the slightest touch of "wine or strong drink, or any unclean thing." And Luther, who burst the chains of half Europe, was as remarkable for temperance, as for great bodily and intellectual vigor. "It often happened," says his biographer, "that for several days and nights he locked himself up in his study, and took no other nourishment than bread and water, that he might the more uninterruptedly pursue his labors." Sir Isaac Newton, also, while composing his Treatise on Light, a work requiring the greatest clearness of intellect, abstained not only from spirit, but from all stimulating food. The immortal Edwards, too, repeatedly records his own experience of the happy effect of strict temperance both on mind and body. And the recent reformations from moderate drinking, in different parts of the land, have revealed numerous examples of renovated health and

spirits in consequence of the change. But not to multiply instances, let any youth, oppressed with heaviness of brain, or dulness of intellect, thoroughly try the experiment of *temperance in all things*, united with great activity, and he will himself be surprised at the happy effect.

10. The habit of temperance, being closely allied to other virtues, *will secure for you the respect and confidence of the best part of the community*, and thus lead to your more extensive usefulness, as well as prosperity and happiness. The youth who comes up to the resolution of entire abstinence for ever, and persuades others so to do, gives evidence of moral courage—gives evidence that he has the power of self-denial—gives evidence of an intellect and moral sense predominating over appetite, and selfishness, and the laugh of fools; and such is the youth whom a virtuous and intelligent community will delight to honor.

11. *Let true patriotism and philanthropy inspire you with an utter abhorrence of this national evil.* A thick fiery vapor, coming up from the pit, has overspread the whole land, and blighted half its glory. Tens of thousands of our citizens, poisoned and polluted by this vapor, and fitted only to dwell in fire, have yearly sunk down into that pit, to weep and lament for ever. Upward of four hundred thousand more, according to calculation, are at this moment groping their miserable way to that same pit, who, but for this pestilence, might have been among our happiest and most respected citizens. A still greater number, of near connexions, are in consequence covered with shame, weeping, and woe. Ah! who can say, he has no relative ruined by this plague? Three years ago, the infection had become almost universal. But God, in great mercy, has inspired his servants to publish the only remedy—**ABSTINENCE, TOTAL ABSTINENCE FOR EVER.** Great multitudes have already believed, and obeyed, and are now safe from the plague. The remedy is sufficient for the whole world. And, instead of costing any thing, its general application in the United States would be an annual saving of *many millions of dollars*. What youth, then, what child, that loves his country, that loves mankind, will not now co-operate with patriots, and statesmen, and physicians, and divines, and the respected of every name, in applying the remedy? Who does not see its certain efficacy, and the grandeur of the result? Who does not see that drunkards are all formed by moderate drinking? and that if the young will abstain, all drunkards now living will soon die, and the great national evil be exterminated? What youth, then, is so perverse, so cold to his country's glory, so devoid of philanthropy, that he will not abstain?

While Wilberforce was lifting his voice for the abolition of the slave-trade, three hundred thousands in Great Britain abandoned the use of sugar. And when our patriot fathers resisted foreign taxation, hundreds of thousands in this land renounced the use of tea. And could they thus abstain from things agreeable and innocent, because they hated oppression? and is there a patriot youth, who will not openly renounce that which poisons alike both soul and body, and inflicts both temporal and eternal bondage?

Were a foreign despot now landing great armies on our shores, and threatening to enslave the whole country, every youthful bosom would swell with indignation, every sword be unsheathed, and every bayonet pointed. And will you not combine to arrest the more cruel despot, Intemperance, who murders nearly all his prisoners, whose vessels are continually entering our ports, whose magazines of death are now planted in all our villages, and whose manufactories, in the very midst of us and throughout the land, are like "the worm that dieth not and the fire that is not quenched?"

Were all who have the past year been found drunk in the land, now collected in one place, they would make a greater army than ever Buonaparte commanded. And yet those now on the road to drunkenness would make a

vastly greater army still. And these too, with myriads more that will come on in the same track, unless some patriot band interpose and rally the nation, are nearly all destined for slaughter, and for the world of wo.

Were one half the amount of liquid fire, that is swallowed annually by that army of drunkards, collected in one great lake, it would be more than large enough for all of them to swim in. And yet a vastly greater quantity is swallowed by the more numerous and more dangerous army of *moderate* drinkers.

Were those thirty thousand victims that annually descend to the drunkard's grave, cast out at once into an open field, they would cover five acres of ground with their putrifying carcasses. And yet far greater numbers are slain by the insidious practice of *moderate* drinking.

Were the thousands of distilleries and manufactories of the poison, that are now at work day and night in our land, placed in one county, they would blacken all the surrounding heavens with their smoke; and render that blackness still more terrific by the gleaming of their midnight fires.*

Could all the oaths, obscenities, and blasphemies, which ardent spirit occasions every hour, be uttered in one voice, it would be loud as "seven thunders."

And, my young friends, are those armies of drunkards, and that lake of fire, and those rotting carcasses of the slain, and those ever-burning manufactories, and those oaths and blasphemies in the ear of God, less appalling to humanity—less stirring to patriotism—because they appear every where throughout the land? Shall there be no general burst of indignation against this monster of despotism, and cruelty, and wickedness, because he has *insidiously* got possession of the country, instead of coming in by one bold invasion? Shall he now with his legions march openly through the land, and plant his engines, and forge his chains, and insult the Heavens, and strew the earth with desolation? Or shall he not rather, by universal consent, be arrested—when it can be done without cost, and with infinite gain?

It must not be forgotten here, that in nearly all the States, every male drunkard, of proper age, is a voter; and has equal power in the elective franchise with the most elevated citizen. Nor can it be concealed, that thousands of votes are every year purchased by this poison. Nor must it be forgotten, that, should intemperance increase for fifty years to come, in the same ratio that it did for twenty years previous to eighteen hundred and twenty-six, about one-third of our voters would be drunkards; and probably half the remainder somewhat intemperate. What then would be the character of our beloved Republic? What a spectacle would she present to surrounding nations! and how would she appear in the pure eye of Heaven!

But should the tide of intemperance still roll on, and, with the population, increase in the same ratio for *eighty* years, a *majority* of our voters would be drunkards; and our population then amount to a *MUNDRED MILLIONS*. Who then could rally the nation, and turn back the burning tide? Or who could govern the maddening multitudes, and save our ship amid the raging of such a sea of fire?

It is not a vain thing, then, that patriots and philanthropists have waked up to this subject. Their trumpet should thrill in thunders through the land; and in tones of redeeming mercy, should urge *all the young* to save themselves and their children. *These* can, if they will, cause the river of abominations to be dried up; and the pure river of God to flow in its place.

It is obvious, that if this great evil were wholly done away, *the Gospel would have far mightier sway*, and human nature generally would assume a much

* As early as 1815, according to the Hon. Timothy Pitkin's Statistics, there were in the United States, thirty-eight thousand five hundred and thirty distilleries!!

higher character. Pure intellectual and moral stimulus would take the place of that which is low, sensual, and devilish. Better health, better temper, loftier intellect, and more expanded benevolence would every where appear. Men, instead of sinking below brutality itself, would be rising in knowledge and purity, and striving to "be perfect as their Father in heaven is perfect."

It is obvious, likewise, that Providence has great and happy events to be accomplished by the younger portions of this and our parent nation. Unto them, especially, are revealed those oracles which declare, "Instead of the fathers shall be the children, whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth." And already do I see, in the silent kindling and expanding of unnumbered minds, the presage of a moral earthquake, that will prostrate every despotic throne, and "every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God." Millions, trained in Sabbath-schools and kindred institutions, will soon be "sanctified through the truth;" and then "great will be the company of those that publish it." Sound in body and mind, and quickened by the Spirit of Heaven, they will be "mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strong holds." The best talent in every department of life will then be put in requisition for the highest interests of man.

Who then, of the rising race, is so dull, so dead to generous feeling, so deaf to the voice of Providence, so blind to the beauty of moral excellence, that he will not now aspire to some course of worthy action? And what parent that loves his child, will not exult to see him aiming at the highest usefulness, honor, and blessedness of which he is capable? Let this motto, then, be inscribed on every dwelling; **HE THAT STRIVETH FOR THE MASTERY IS TEMPERATE IN ALL THINGS.**

Can any father or mother still encourage the young to drink in the poison? Such a *mother* there cannot be. And if there be a father, whose "breath is corrupt," and who, to keep himself in countenance, insidiously poisons his children also, God will most assuredly curse him; a reformed community will despise him; and his own dear offspring may yet turn upon him, in agony, and curse him for ever. "*Wo to that man, by whom the offence cometh.*"

Nor let any parent rest satisfied with merely exerting no *bad* influence upon his child. He is bound by the authority of Heaven to exert directly a *good* influence. When it is said by the Most High, "that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him," it is immediately added, "For I know him that he will *command* his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord." And when again by his servant Moses, God recounts his great mercies, and portrays his coming vengeance on the violators of his law, in the most glowing language ever addressed to any nation; he solemnly adds: "Which ye shall *command* your *children* to observe, to do all the words of this law; for it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life."

Let every parent, then, who would redeem this nation from intemperance, and make her great and happy, "the joy of the whole earth," not only "abstain from all appearance of evil," but, like "the father of many nations, command *his children and his household after him.*"

One word in relation to signing a *united pledge* for abstinence. As it respects yourself, it will be deciding the question, once for all, and thus supersede the necessity of deciding it a thousand times, when the temptation is offered, and when you may not be in circumstances so favorable to a correct decision. It will moreover supersede the pain of a perpetual *warfare* with appetite and temptation. And, as it respects others, of feeblér minds and stronger appetites, your explicit *example* and influence may be immeasurably important. Multitudes may thus be secured to a life of entire abstinence, and

some reclaimed from drunkenness, who, but for this pledge, would never have had the requisite courage and firmness. Your influence may thus extend indefinitely, on the right hand and on the left, and down to future ages. And by such united efforts, great multitudes which no man can number, will be saved from a life of wretchedness, a death of infamy, and an eternity of blasphemy and wo.

Does any youth now say, *he* will unite in no pledge, because *he* is in no danger. Ah! you *may* be in imminent danger, which you do not see. But suppose *you are safe*; have you then no *benevolence*? Think how many a bosom must this very night be wrung with agony, over a drunken husband, or father, or brother! And have you no *pity*? Is your heart made of *iron*? Think how many millions of hopes for both worlds are suspended on the issue of the Temperance Cause. And will you do nothing to aid its speedy triumph?

Do you say, your influence is of no account, because you are small, or young, or poor? It was one poor man that saved "a little city," when "a great king besieged it." Another poor man saved a "great city," when the anger of Jehovah was kindled against it. Small as you may think yourself to be, you are accountable to God and your country; and your finger may touch some string that will vibrate through the nation; your prayer may "move the hand that moves the world."

But are you conscious of possessing some influence? and have you a tongue to speak? Then rally the circle of your acquaintance, and enlist them in the sacred cause. And do you *gain* a little by abstinence? Then *give* a little to extend the saving influence. What youth cannot spare six cents, to procure as many Tracts; and perhaps to reclaim as many families? And who can estimate the endless influence of those families?

But do you inherit *wealth*? Then speak by ten thousand tongues—send winged messengers through the city, the country, the town, the village, the harbor—and hope for your reward in that world, where, saith the Scripture, "neither thieves, nor *covetous*, nor *drunkards*, nor revilers, nor extortioners, nor *any thing that defileth*, or worketh abomination, shall ever enter."

I cannot close without just alluding to results, which must quickly follow, should the reformation, now in progress, be triumphant through the land. O, could the men, who first conceived the enterprise of freeing this great nation from intemperance, behold the object accomplished, as it were in a day, they would then feel, and the nation would feel, that nothing desirable is too hard to be undertaken. They would at once inquire, what other great evil needs to be removed, and *speak the word*, and with God's blessing *it would be done*. Reformation would thus follow reformation, till this whole land should become "a mountain of holiness," blooming all over with "trees of righteousness."

Meanwhile, other portions of the human family, beholding what Christian freemen can do, would emulate our bright example, and nation after "nation be born in a day."

Rise, then, ye young hope of your country and the world; exhibit one general combination of moral courage, intelligence, and purity; and, with corresponding effort, say to the whole earth, *that the hour of her redemption is come*.

Happy! thrice happy ye! who may thus have the honor of dashing away for ever the cup of drunkenness, and washing this foul stain from our country's glory. Happy the generation! who may rise up instead of the fathers, and, like the rainbow above the retiring cloud, reflect from one end of the earth to the other, the glories of a millennial Sun.

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